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ABSTRACT

Proxemics is a simulation designed to show how man exhibits different behaviors in given distances. Additionally, the simulation, in most instances, shows how people are feeling toward one another at the time a particular distance is used. The four main distances that man observes are intimate, personal, social, and public. Each of these distances has a close and a far phase, and, in general, varies from culture to culture. (Author)

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Game + Simulation

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PROXEMICS*

Designed by Dale F. Baltus

January 5, 1974

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Introduction:

PROXEMICS is a simulation designed to show how man exhibits different behaviors in given distances. Additionally, the simulation, in most instances, shows how people are feeling toward one another at the time a particular distance is used.

The four main distances that man observes are intimate, personal, social and public. Each of these distances has a close and a far phase and, in general, varies from culture to culture.

Directions:

1. Ask the participants to select a partner that they do not know personally. If that is impossible, ignore this rule. Additionally, and whenever possible, ask that two whites not be partners in this simulation.

2. Give the participants a distance mind set. For example, explain to them that each floor tile represents so many inches. If the simulation is conducted on a carpet, you can give each participant a piece of plain typing paper (eight and one-half inches by eleven inches).

3. Inform the participants that after you have gone through the first set of distances you will ask them to be seated as partners. Explain that at first this may seem strange but you are going to go through several standing distances and verbally debrief after each distance has been experienced. To debrief while they remain standing will prove to be uncomfortable.

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4. Ask each participant to stand as close to their partner as possible without touching and look each other in the eyes and talk. Try to have them hold this distance for at least five seconds (intimate distance, close phase). Observe every behavior they exhibit (giggling, moving away, looking away, shuffling, embarrassment, et al). Then, ask each participant to look down and see how far apart they are from one another and note the distance. Finally, ask each participant to move 18 inches apart from one another and look each other in the eyes and talk, observe their behaviors. Now, ask the participants to be seated for the debriefing. (See A., debriefing and application for the intimate cultural distance.)

5. Again, ask the participants to rise and face their partners at a distance of 18 inches. (Note: Do not allow participants to have an object between them, i.e., chair, purse, desk, bench, etc., as this will expand the distance.) Slowly, ask them to move out to 24 inches, look each other in the eyes and talk for about 30 seconds. After you have observed their behaviors at 24 inches, ask them to move out to 4 feet, look each other in the eyes and talk for about 60 seconds. Now, ask them to move to some distance they feel comfortable with, between 18 inches and 4 feet. Instruct them to look each other in the eyes and talk at this distance. After approximately 60 seconds, interrupt them and ask them to be seated for debriefing. (See B., debriefing and application for the personal culture distance.) Note: It will be difficult to interrupt them as they will be engrossed in their conversation. You may have to clap your hands or make some other loud noise.

6. Participants are asked to rise and assume the far phase of the personal distance (4 feet) with their partners. Soon after reaching this distance, they are asked to step away from each other and spend 15 second intervals facing one another at 5 feet, 6 feet, 7 feet, 8 feet, 9 feet, 10 feet, 11 feet

and 12 feet intervals. After observing their behaviors at these intervals, participants are asked to sit for the debriefing (See C., debriefing and application for the social cultural distance).

7. Space permitting, participants are asked to rise and go at least 12 feet from their partners. They are then asked to talk to one another for at least 10 seconds. This is repeated at distances of 14 feet, 16 feet, 18 feet, 20 feet, 22 feet and 25 feet. After this exercise has been completed, participants are asked to sit for a final debriefing and application (See D., debriefing and application for the public cultural distance). Note: If space does not permit each participant to move 25 feet from their partner, the exercise can be accomplished by the group observing selected participants experiencing these distances.

DEBRIEFING AND APPLICATION

Introduction:

After each distance has been experienced, the facilitator should ask the participants for their comments on the distance experienced. A good lead question would be, "Did you feel uncomfortable at this distance?" Following their comments the facilitator should explain each distance and as much as possible, give examples of their behavior throughout the debriefing.

A. Intimate Cultural Distance (0-18 inches)

At the intimate distance, one feels uncomfortable and tends to move about because of increased sensory inputs. Sight is often distorted at this distance, you can smell, see and hear and feel the body heat of your partner. Physical contact is uppermost in the awareness of both persons. People tend to whisper at this distance because it has the effect of expanding the distance. Vocalizations that do occur at this distance tend to be involuntary. Most people in public tend to move away from one another at this distance. They cannot look one another in the eyes and a shuffling of the feet occurs until the distance from one another is expanded.

The use of the intimate distance in public is not considered proper by adult, middle class Americans. Think of crowded subways and elevators. In this type of spatial relationship, riders have defensive mechanisms. They bring their feet closely together, hands at their sides, and become immobile, they do not look at one another and if they should touch, withdraw as soon as possible. In the main, the eyes are fixed on infinity and are not brought to bear on anyone for more than a passing glance. It should be noted that the measured distances vary with differences in personality and environmental factors, such as a high noise level or

low illumination will ordinarily bring people closer together. Other exceptions to this rule are cultural in nature. American proxemic patterns for intimate distance are not universal. Many of the features characteristic of American intimate distance are present in Russian social distance. Middle Eastern subjects in public places do not express the outraged reaction to being touched by strangers which one encounters in American subjects.

Application:

Ask the participants how they can apply this knowledge of the intimate distance to their educational settings? For example: Are small children uncomfortable at the intimate distance? Should colognes or perfumes be worn by teachers and at what levels of instruction? Will high school students look you "in the eye" at this distance? Will Latin Americans tend to stand closer than white middle class Americans? Will blacks not occulturated to the white, middle class American intimate distance stand closer and to what effect? How can administrators and teachers use this distance to their advantage?

B. Personal Cultural Distance (18 inches to 4 feet)

At personal distance, close phase (1½ to 2½ feet) kinesic sense of closeness derives in part from what each participant can do to the other with his extremities. One can grasp the other person. There is noticeable feedback from muscles that control the eyes. The face is seen with exceptional clarity. Three dimensional quality of objects is pronounced. Surface textures are very prominent and clearly differentiated from each other. Where people stand in relation to each other signals their relationship, or how they feel toward each other or both. A wife can stay inside the circle of her husband's close personal zone with impunity. For another woman to do so is a different story.

The personal distance, far phase ($2\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 feet) extends from a point just outside easy touching distance by one person to a point where two people can touch fingers if they extend both arms. This is the limit of physical domination. Subjects of personal interest and involvement can be discussed at this distance. Head size is perceived as normal and details of the other person's features are clearly visible. Foveal vision covers an area the size of one eye, so that the gaze must wander around the face. Movement of the hands is detected, but fingers cannot be counted. The voice level is moderate. No body heat is perceptible. Olfaction is not normally present for Americans, but other people use colognes to create an olfactory bubble. Breath odor can sometimes be detected at this distance, but Americans are trained to direct their breath away from others. At a distance of between 3 feet and 4 feet, people tend to talk comfortably with one another. In most cases, if someone does not say something, uneasiness is felt until someone does say something. This is the distance whereby "that person" whom you just cannot get away from, resides.

Application:

If you really want to talk to a student or colleauge, where should you stand? Where should students sit in your classroom? Why do students in the back of a classroom tend to misbehave more than those in the front? How can you correct this situation by knowing the personal distance?

C. Social Cultural Distance (4 to 12 feet)

The boundary line between personal distance and social distance marks the "limit of domination." There is no intimate facial detail, no touching another person, little change between far and close phases, and a normal American voice level.

At social distance, close phase (4 to 7 feet) people tend to shift their gaze back and forth from eye to eye or from eyes to mouth. Impersonal business occurs at this distance. There is more involvement than in the distant phase. People who work together tend to use close social distance. It is a common distance for people who are attending a casual social gathering. To stand and look down at a person at this distance has a domineering effect.

Social distance, far phase (7 to 12 feet) is the distance to which people move when someone says, "Stand away so I can look at you." Business and social discourse conducted at this distance is more formal. Desks in the offices of important people are large enough to hold visitors at the far phase of social distance. Chairs in an office are eight or nine feet away from the man behind the desk. Finest details of the face are lost. Skin texture, hair, condition of teeth, and condition of clothes are all readily visible. Feedback from the eye muscles used to hold the eyes inward on a single spot falls off rapidly. Eyes and mouth of the other person are seen in the area of sharpest vision.

Proxemic behavior of this sort is culturally conditioned and entirely arbitrary. It is binding on all concerned. To fail to hold the other person's eye is to shut him out and bring conversation to a holt. When one person is seated and the other is standing, prolonged visual contact at less than ten or twelve feet tires the neck muscles and is generally avoided by subordinates who are sensitive to their employer's comfort. If the status of the two is reversed so that the subordinate is seated, the other party may often come closer.

At this distant phase, the voice is louder. Raising the voice can have the effect of reducing social distance to personal distance.

A proxemic feature of social distance, far phase is that it can be used to insulate people from each other. This distance makes it possible for them to continue to work in the presence of another person without appearing to be rude.

the voice drops. When people look like ants, contact with them as human beings fades rapidly.

Application:

With what frequency and for how long should large convocations be scheduled? Can you correctly interpret what someone says to you at a distance of 12 feet, 14 feet, 16 feet, 18 feet, 20 feet, 22 feet and 25 feet? How can you effectively supervise large convocations, athletic events or co-curricular activities?

1. Proxemics is a term coined for the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture. More information concerning distances can be obtained from the book by:

Hall, Edward T. The Hidden Dimension, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966 (Anchor Books edition: 1969.)